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ABSTRACT

By looking at changes in the status and role of the fqih or traditional Islamic teacher in Morocco, it is possible to trace the transformation of the entire learning system from an independent, teacher-centered approach to a government-controlled educational system, of which religious education is only a part. In the traditional system, students memorized and recited the Quran at lower levels, and at higher levels studied exegesis, grammar, and law. The teacher's educational background consisted of local level schooling, travel for study-apprenticeships with individual scholars, and usually attendance at formal centers of Islamic study. The goal was acquisition of a quality called "ilm" (knowledge). Pressures for changes in this system began early in the 20th century when Morocco was a French protectorate. In 1968, the Moroccan government merged the Islamic and government schools so that fqihs now teach five- and six-year olds. Higher religious instruction now occurs through specialized secondary schools and universities. The traditional teacher's techniques and status have changed considerably and parents now see the teacher as a countervailing force to rapid social change. (IS)

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The Making of a Faqih: The Transformation of Traditional Islamic Teachers in Modern Times.

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Papers from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation
Project on Human Potential

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SO 016 269

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I. Introduction: Individuals as Institutions

This paper considers the development of the Quranic school through the figure of its teacher, the fqih. The Islamic educational system in Morocco can be said to be embodied in its teachers, and for this reason we focus primarily on such individuals' experiences, both as students themselves in the Quranic school system, and as teachers and community figures. In the process, we trace the profound changes that the system has undergone in recent years -- changes that these teachers have witnessed and experienced within the span of their lifetimes.

Tradition supports this "teacher-centered" approach. The Quran -- the primary text to be mastered in Quranic school -- is believed to be the actual word of God, and as such, is meant to be recited aloud. Learning to recite can only be accomplished with the help of a master skilled in phrasing and pronunciation conventions. While much independent study of the text may also take place, it cannot replace the training and oral modeling provided by the fqih (Labib, 1975). Secondly, students in search of the higher levels of Islamic education such as exegesis, grammar, and law, traditionally travelled great distances to study with a scholar reputed to be particularly learned in one of these disciplines. The student's program of study at this level consisted not of attendance at one particular institution, but a series of apprenticeships with individual scholars who might be living all across the country. In the same vein, there was no single "diploma" describing and capping one's course of study. Instead, a documentation of the scholars with whom one had worked (ijaza), sometimes including their recommendation and notice of satisfactory mastery of material, was the standard proof of education, and

carried weight depending on the reputations of the scholars worked with. In many cases, an individual's reputation, along with a known history of study with renowned scholars, was more important in attracting students to establish one's own school than any document one might possess (Eickelman, 1978). And the Quranic school, to this day, is often any available space -- garage, single rented room -- in which a master and his students can convene; the importance of the teacher is such that the schools themselves are often referred to simply by the name of the fqih who teaches there.

Islamic teaching as the enterprise of individual fqihs extended even to the university level, where one might expect a more complex administrative hierarchy. However, when the French decided to "nationalize" the great Moroccan Islamic universities--the Qaraviyyin and the Yusufiyya—in the 1930's, their first attempts to negotiate with these institutions were frustrated by the lack of an administrative structure familiar to them. The French officials then set about imposing such a structure on a system that had previously operated as a confederation of recognized scholars and students, living and studying together in buildings erected and maintained by rich benefactors and the revenue of the religious community (Eickelman 1978).

The centrality of the role of the teacher in traditional Morocco is a theme present at all levels of Islamic learning. In the words of one informant, himself a tailor, a former Quranic school teacher, and known as a fqih by his community,

> I think that in everything, you need a teacher. It is possible to study by yourself, but it would be much easier with a fqih. For example, if you are traveling on a road you don't know, if you go by yourself without asking you might know some of it. But if you ask someone, "the teacher of the road," he will show you the easiest way to go.1

The range of meanings ascribed to the term fqih is of particular

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importance and requires some further clarification at this point. How may we differentiate between the Quranic school teacher, the traditional healer, and the proverbial "wise man," all popularly hailed in Morocco as "fqih?" In its literal sense, the term designates a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). But, in common Moroccan usage, it signifies more generally, an individual with a certain level and type of religious knowledge, usually attained through formal religious schooling. Just what knowledge is required, however, depends on both the scholarly level and social conditions of the community in which he operates. For example, in a rural or low-income urban area with a low adult literacy rate or little religious scholarship, an individual may be recognized as a fqih on the basis of his own greater, but still very limited, religious and literacy training. This same level of training, however, would not be sufficient to earn him the same title in a more literate or scholarly circle. In our interviews, the qualifications for becoming a fqih were frequently defined in broad, imprecise terms, open to interpretation:

> (The fqih)... knew religion in general... His head was like a sea, he could talk about every field. That is why he was a fqih... The Quran states that if someone is good with Allah, Allah makes him a fqih of religion, a fqih of both religion and life. A fqih is someone who is very knowledgeable about both religion and life. He knows what to do in life and after death.

The function and responsibilities of a fqih in his community are somewhat clearer. His role as "teacher" in the broad sense, is central to his identity as a fqih:

> His duties are to teach people the message of what he has learned. He should tell people (what) Allah has told us to do... If someone asks him about something in religion, he should answer him.

In the words of another informant, "The fqih is someone who instructs

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people in their religion and guides them in their religion." Therefore, while individuals recognized as fqihs may be found in many areas of employment -- prayer leaders at the mosque, charm-writers, merchants, tailors, bath-house owners, even soldiers -- the title of fqih still retains the sense of "teacher". The term is used here to refer specifically to the fqih employed as a Quranic school teacher, unless otherwise noted.[2]

In the discussion below, we describe the traditional form of Islamic education as experienced by fqihs as students. We then juxtapose this picture with contemporary change in this traditional system of education. In doing so, related changes in status of fqihs are brought into relief, as well as the problem of adaptations of these scholars and their communities in times of rapid change.

II. The Fqih and Traditional Islamic Learning

In order to understand the present situation of the fqih in Morocco, it is important first to characterize his traditional place in the community and the process by which he acquired his title. A fqih's training typically comprised three stages. First there was a period of study in his home-town Quranic school, during which he completed a major portion of the task of committing the Quran to memory. The second stage entailed travelling to other towns for study-apprenticeships with individual scholars. The final stage was marked by attendance at a formal center of Islamic learning such as the Qaraviyyin in Fes or the Yusufiyya in Marrakech, where scholars and students of all subjects of the Islamic sciences were gathered. Depending on the quality of his teachers and the range of studies he had mastered during his period of travels, a student might earn a reputation as a fqih even if he

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chose not to continue to this third stage; the important thing was to have acquired that elusive quality called 'ilm or "knowledge," to the satisfaction of his community. The present section, based on the accounts of former students in Quranic educational institutions, will describe this educational process in greater detail. These accounts are highly consistent with existing historical descriptions (Meakin, 1902; Michaux-Bellaire, 1911).

The long process of Quranic education traditionally began when a young child was escorted by his father to join his peers at the neighborhood jami' ('mosque' in colloquial Arabic; but also used to denote the Quranic school), and presented to the stern figure who would be his first Quranic teacher.[3] Even for a youngster of seven, study would start early in the morning and continue to sunset, with a short midday break. A pupil's first task each morning upon arrival at the jami', if he had mastered his previous day's lesson to the satisfaction of the fqih, was to perform the process of washing the luha (wooden tablet). He scrubbed off the Quranic verses which had been written on it the day before; the washing solution was a water-and-clay mixture which, when dried before the fire, produced a whitened writing surface ready to receive the new day's text. Next, as pupils approached him one by one, the fqih would write a small section of the Quran on each child's individual luha with a black ink. The fqih or an older student (talib) in the school, first read the segment aloud to the child, modeling pronunciation and phrasing; the pupil then spent the rest of the day memorizing the text on his board, word for word. The youngest children in the school received the most direct supervision and monitoring of their recitation practice, by the fqih or a talib, while others practiced on their own or in groups, reading the text aloud softly, over and over. At the end of each day, the fqih checked his students' progress, expecting each to recite from

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memory all that was written on his board (c.f., Wagner & Lotfi, 1980).

Substantial memorization progress, such as a child's mastery of a fourth (rubu') of the Quran, was publicly recognized by a small procession and feast (zarda) given by the child's parents. The largest and most extravagant of these celebrations would take place when the child had successfully memorized the entire book. This level was generally achieved in 6 to 8 years of study, although socioeconomic considerations and personal inclinations prevented the majority of young men from reaching even this point. But those few still able and willing, and now old enough to travel on their own, could opt to continue their studies by seeking out fqihs with special expertise in other towns.

The student, now called musafir or "traveller," having found a teacher in a new town willing to instruct him, would study and lodge in the mosque with the fqih and other students for a few years, until he had mastered the special training of that fqih. During this time, his sustenance was provided by a family in the village who had agreed to support him in this way, or by gifts of food given by villagers to the school community as a whole. According to one informant,

> The musafirs ... were a contented lot, struggling for the sake of Islam and the Quran, and so without money because they received no pay. They were, in fact, unable to afford even to ride cars or buses from one town to another. They travelled bearing their wooden boards and their clothes on their backs, untroubled by the weight of their burden or the long distances, until they reached their destination on foot.

At certain times, the fqih and his students might make a tour (adwal) of homes in neighboring villages, chanting Quranic verses and soliciting stores of butter, wheat, money, chickens, or oil from the villagers. The success of this lifestyle can be attributed to the belief that generosity to students of

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the Quran would ensure the giver of baraka ("blessing from God").[4]

At this musafir stage, students would be expected to be able to write from memory the Quranic verses on their boards, in order to review them. Such reviewing was an important procedure, intended to solidify one's acquistion of the holy text. At least one fqih has likened it to a voyage: "If you are going to Marrakech for the first time, you learn some of (the route). Then a second time, you know some more; then a third time and so on (you will learn more) until you know all of it." After the first complete memorization (salka) of the Quran, achieved at the home-town jami', the whole process was now repeated from the opposite direction: the last section that had been memorized was now first, the second-to-last now second, and so on. Before going on to memorize a passage again, however, the student would present his board to the fqih, who corrected any errors--and administered physical punishment (such as beating with a stick, or sharply twisting the skin of the neck) for every mistake. Oral reading (tadwiza) with the fqih would follow until the student had mastered the corrected words, whereupon he would return to reading and memorizing on his own. Ignorance of the meaning of the words being read and recited was common even at this stage:

> Interviewer: Did you understand the Quran when you memorized it?
>
> Fqih: No. You can't understand the Quran without studying 'ilm (knowledge; science; the Islamic sciences).
>
> Interviewer: Did you ever care about understanding Quran when you were memorizing it?
>
> Fqih: When I was memorizing, I used to hear, "This man went to study 'ilm," and so on. So I decided to go study 'ilm as soon as I finished studying the Quran. I was thinking of going either to a (rural) madrasa 'ilmiyya (institute of religious sciences; lit. "school of knowledge") or going to Marrakech (to the Yusufiyya) because it was famous like the Qarawiyyin in Fes.

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For this informant, the act of memorizing a text and that of understanding or acquiring knowledge, were two distinct stages in one's pursuit of an education. At their peak, the Qarawiyyin and Yusufiyya institutions enjoyed an international reputation as schools of Islamic learning, to the extent that one informant concluded, "Knowledge ('ilm) was in Fes and Marrakech." But upon reflection, most informants agreed that the higher levels of 'ilm could also be acquired during one's studies as a musafir under the tutelage of individual scholars, or by attendance at certain smaller institutions (mahads).[5]

A fqih who attended the Yusufiyya explained that he studied Arabic grammar and verb conjugations[6], and the primary texts of rules and legal principles of Islam. When he arrived there in the 1940's, the French reorganization of the institution had already taken place. The system was divided into 3 primary years of study, 6 intermediate years, and 3 terminal years, each year with a prescribed curriculum, as in the French secular school system. For a time, however, the traditional ambience of the school remained intact:

> Fqih: There were no blackboards, no desks. The fqih brings his rug (labda) and the students bring their rugs and sit around the fqih and listen to him . . .
>
> Interviewer: Were there separate classrooms for the different levels of students?
>
> Fqih: It's a big mosque! (i.e., 'No, it was a single room!'). Concerning the fqihs, one doesn't hear the other. One is here, the other is there, and so on. The first year (was) in one place, the second year in another place. . . . Every class was in a (certain) place and no one could go to any class if he was not supposed to be there.

Lessons in the study circles would generally proceed with one student reading aloud from the text under discussion, of which there was frequently only one

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copy available to the group. At intervals, the master interjected his commentaries and elaborations, usually fixed and rather formulaic. The students (talibs) might take notes during the session or not, but in the evenings would prepare transcriptions of the teacher's commentary from their notes or completely from memory.

This depiction typifies such schools as they existed in the mid-1940's. However, the French administrative intervention was soon followed by curricular and legal modifications, which led eventually to important changes in the roles and status of fqihs in their communities.

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III. The Period of Transition: Changes in the Traditional System

The bureaucratization of public services and the introduction of French as a second official language during the French Protectorate of Morocco (1912-1956), brought on a host of new and secular literacy requirements which the fqih was unable to fill, either for himself or his community (Wagner, Messick & Spratt, in press). For access to jobs in the public sector, a new importance was placed on officially recognized written school diplomas, which fqihs and their students did not possess. Such changes are linked to another institution introduced in this period, the government public school system, which was based on the French educational model. The new schools rivalled the traditional system directly, for both students and prestige.

The government schools were at first regarded with scepticism by many Moroccans. Stories of resistance to attending the French schools abound, especially in rural areas. One woman remembers locking her children up in a room and feigning ignorance of their whereabouts whenever the local French-appointed truant officer came asking about them. She held a belief common at the time, that the foreigners planned to spirit her children off to France. Another story recalls an event in which a group of stubborn parents poured wine all over one hapless official, who tried (unsuccessfully) to convince them to send their children to the French school. Still another tactic employed by some, was to present the truant officer with sugar and other gifts, to persuade him not to send their children to school. A popular saying of the day ran thus: "He who takes his son to (the government) school, will perish

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in Hell on the Day of Judgment."[7]

Attendance at the modern primary school has grown substantially over subsequent decades, and is now said to comprise 60-70% of Moroccan school-age children. Reasons for this increase lay in a combination of governmental legal pressures such as: mandatory public school attendance;[8] growing appreciation for the practical learning, including secular literacy, provided by such institutions; and hope of access to skilled jobs in the modern economic sector.

The fqihs we have described in this paper attended the intermediate and higher-level Quranic institutions during this transitional period. One younger informant recalled being sent by his father, in the early 1960's, to continue his education in the Quranic school despite pressures from the authorities to attend the new government school in his village:

> A new school was constructed on the land next to us. . . With the help of some notables, a count was made of all families with children (so that they should be sent) to the school. My father categorically refused to send me to that new school, so the local authorities summoned him and threatened him with imprisonment and other punishments. (His father responded:) "If this is my child, then I am free to direct him whither I please, and if this matter concerns you more that it does me, then I do not want him to (learn to) read at all."
>
> I returned to the masjid (mosque; here, Quranic classes) to continue my studies, and my father was subjected to continued harassment from the authorities, who wanted the number of students at the school to reach the requisite level. My father's response was: "I want my son to read the Quran only. As for your notion of instruction, it is incompatible with Islam."
>
> Before this (new) school was opened, the number of children studying at our masjid was thirty-five. After they entered school, only I remained.

A detail of particular interest in this informant's account, is that the authorities did not actually take any legal action against his father; it appears that they were not yet ready to deal with the difficult problem of

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suppressing a traditional religious stance.

In 1968 the Moroccan government announced "Operation Quranic School" in an attempt to reconcile the two educational systems, modern-Western and traditional, once and for all. With government sanction, the Quranic school would regain some of its flagging prestige and attendance, and be brought under a certain amount of national control and supervision. It was officially recognized as the preferred prerequisite for a child's entry into the modern system at age seven. In King Hassan II's speech which launched the project, he proclaimed:

> For 2 years, (Operation Quranic School) will allow parents not to have to concern themselves too much with the basic upbringing of their children... It diminishes the danger of juvenile delinquents. In Morocco, a child is started in school at the age of seven. It is vital that someone look after his upbringing between the age of five and that of starting school, especially when his father and mother both have to work away from home (King Hassan II, 1968).

Of special interest here is that his words are clearly addressed to a particular audience: the modern nuclear family with both parents working outside the home, interested primarily in child care facilities.

As discussed earlier, transformation of traditional Islamic schooling in Morocco had begun over two decades prior to Operation Quranic School. And yet, the announcement of the new program marked a crucial turning-point for the traditional Quranic school teacher. From an institution devoted to the complete mastery of the Quran and the study of the Islamic sciences, Quranic schooling now became officially legislated as a preschool charged with teaching the rudiments of reading, writing, and math in preparation for primary school. Certain traditional pedagogical features have remained in the jami', such as memorization of a small number of the shortest Quranic chapters, and some

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instruction on proper Islamic conduct. But the time allotted to these subjects each day has decreased, due primarily to the addition of government school-preparatory subjects. The fqih is no longer the head of a private enterprise, but subject to periodic inspections by a government official, required to follow curriculum set down by the Ministry of Education, and encouraged to attend pedagogical training sessions designed for Quranic preschool teachers (Jordan, 1975).

As a result of this renovation of the educational system, teaching of Quran and religious sciences at the higher levels has undergone extensive renovations. Traditional madrasas and the travelling apprenticeship system still operate in remote rural regions, but they are without government sanction and have lost most of their clientele to the legal requirement of government school attendance. Officially recognized higher-level religious instruction is now available only in specialized branches of the modern national secondary school and university systems; and the old-style methods of teaching have been largely replaced by the trappings of a modern age, with lectures addressed to large groups of students in lecture halls and classrooms. The famed Qaraviyyin of Fes has donated its name to the Islamic Studies department of the national university, with a branch in Marrakech for the study of Arabic language, and another in Tetouan for Islamic law. In Rabat, King Hassan II has recently established the Dar al-Hadith al-Hassaniyya, a university institute devoted to the study of the traditions of the Prophet. The famous Yusufiyya of Marrakech, however, now functions primarily as a national historical monument, open to tourists.

Among our informants, we have encountered mixed reactions to these changes

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and to the increasing government involvement in religious education. For some, the decreased emphasis on complete memorization of the Quran is a serious problem for the modernized jami', as well as in the religious subjects included in the government school curriculum. As one fqih explained:

> In the old method, there were the jami' (mosque), talib (advanced student) and msafria (travelling students). Like this we used to memorize the Quran. Now there are modern schools and universities where the Quran has become just (a set of) suras (chapters). In the first year (students study the chapter) "Sabih," second year, "Ama," and so on, fifth year "Rahman.". . . Now in the new system, they don't memorize hizb (division; one-sixtieth of the Quran) after hizb, they just study some suras from the Quran. The old way, salka (complete memorization of the Quran), does not exist anymore. The teacher explains some suras to the students. That's all.

Memorization of a few suras is still expected of students in the government schools. However, the Quran is not memorized in its entirety, but at the rate of only one sura per year--and there are 114 suras in the Quran. Some fqihs also claim that the reduction of time allotted to religious instuction in schools is one of the causes of the decrease in religious observation among the younger, modern school-educated generations of Moroccan society.

Despite their regret for losses in the scope and nature of Quranic education in modern times, fqihs also acknowledge practical advantages of a more modern system. At the preschool level, the replacement of the wooden boards, pens, ink and clay, by slates and chalk, has been a welcome convenience. One fqih described the difference:

> I used to teach students on these wooden boards before, but I found that (the boards) are tiring. The students have to wash the board, and the water is cold in winter. Then they have to put the board in the sun until it becomes dry, and then write with a stick. This takes too much time. But now

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> we find that it is easy to use "modern luhas" (slates). If the student makes a mistake, he doesn't have to wash the board and wait for it to dry, but can just erase it and write the correct thing.

Also found to be beneficial, is the possibility for group teaching around a large blackboard, rather than the "old way" described above, which was more individualized, but also more time-consuming. We have observed the blackboard being used in several creative pedagogical ways. The teacher may highlight target letters in words with colored chalk; he may erase letters from a word and then request that students fill them in again, writing from memory on their individual slates. One fqih who employed these methods, claimed he discovered them on his own, and has never attended a government training session.

Other innovative pedagogical methods have also been embraced by many fqihs, whether they have attended modern training sessions or not. Alphabet and single-word learning are frequently introduced, long before the child is expected to decode an entire Quranic passage, traditionally one of the first tasks set before the child. Today, Quranic passages are still practiced, but for the most part only orally, at this preschool stage. A real concern for the children's understanding of the words they read and write also belies a new attitude to teaching. We have observed one fqih quizzing his class orally on Moroccan Arabic equivalents or explanations for written words presented in his lessons, and utilizing concrete items, pictures, and gestures to illustrate concepts. Several fqihs have verbally espoused the government view of the Quranic school as a preparation ground for modern primary school. In addition, the age range of students is more restricted now than it had been in the past; this allows for adjustment of the lesson to the abilities of the whole group:

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> We figured out that the method of teaching today is easier than the method by which we were taught. Before, children used to (start) coming to the Quranic school when they were four years old. They used to sit and not do anything. At that time there were students of different ages in the same school, varying from four (years) to fourteen, and every one had his own way of thinking. Now students are of the same age, so they can talk to each other, discuss with each other, and learn from each other.

Perhaps because of the Quranic schools' expanded curriculum established by the state, one fqih has noted a new inquisitiveness in the children: "In the past, the child learned only what was in front of him. Now he asks for information from all fields and directions." Another rural fqih advocated a diversification of subjects in the Quranic school:

> In (traditional) religious education, it was said that the students had to memorize the suras, while it was not considered important that they understand them. . . . Here we prepare students to go into elementary modern schools. So we should teach them not only the Quran, but also how to read, write, and count, and also discuss with them the suras in the Quran. Otherwise, if the students memorized only the Quran, they would be like blind people.

Similarly a third informant, commenting on present-day higher-level study of the religious sciences, finds it "protected by the university system and ... presented in a modern way, in a clearer, more efficient way." Such remarks are particularly striking in light of the traditional pedagogical approach encountered by these speakers themselves in their own schooling. That approach required the memorization of religious texts and commentaries while suppressing critical discussion of them, for criticism implied a challenge to the divine authority of such texts--in other words, heresy.

The impact of the field of child development on teaching is being felt among both modern and traditional teachers in Morocco. One Quranic school teacher suggested, "In the past, teachers didn't think about abilities of small

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children; they used methods that were too difficult." Similarly, another fqih criticized teachers who ". . . put letters, numbers, texts all on the board at once. It's like 100 kilograms; a child can't lift it all at once. Those (who do this) haven't had experience with children. (At my school,) we only study one word per week." The same fqih expressed interest in improving the children's home environment, as a way of improving attitudes and class performance.

For the most part, fqihs still see Quranic preschool as an important institution for the raising of Muslim children, despite change in school pedagogy. As one fqih put it, "A house that we're going to build needs a foundation. That foundation must be Islamic." When asked whether he expected that the Quranic preschool may one day be entirely replaced by the modern kindergartens already appearing, another fqih contended that such an event was highly unlikely. He argued that the Quranic school is best, because it is where children learn the Quran. In his view, "the Quran contains all the ideas that (any) other school could teach. The Quran's importance does not disappear."

The continuing importance of the fqih in his role as Quranic teacher is not so clear, however, due to recent changes taking place in contemporary Morocco. The following section will explore the impact of these changes on the fqih's position in his community, and its transformation over time.

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IV. Changing Roles and Status of the Fqih

The present section attempts to relate the past and present roles of the fqih in his community to changes in his social and economic status. In traditional Morocco, the fqih was a teacher, scholar, and religious guide, and, as an upholder of Sunni Islam, was scornful of the popular maraboutic worship widespread in rural Morocco. He was not an ordinary member of the community, being a literate figure, a memorizer of the Quran, and one who had gone through the "intense socializing experience" of full-time attendance in Quranic institutions, living in a communal arrangement with teacher(s) and fellow students (cf. Eickelman, 1978; 1983a; see also 1983b).

Another facet of the fqih's status, supported by our own observations, was his authority to punish a child for transgressions committed outside the Quranic school. One informant recalled this kind of extension of the fqih's authority to his own childhood activities:

> The fqih used to force his opinions and ideas on us forcibly and by means of his stick. For instance, the first time the fqih saw me learning to ride a bike, he said to my father, may God rest his soul: 'Do not let him ride on a bike, for this will cause him to forget the Quran he has learned.' He was claiming that simply putting my hand on the handle would cause me to lose what I had stored in my mind from the Quran.

Another former Quranic student recalled the proscriptions of his fqih: "He said to me, 'My student, avoid modern urban centers and shun buses, for if you assume such a nature you will find it difficult to memorize the Quran.'"

The celebration (zarda) given by parents when a child had successfully memorized a sizeable portion of the Quran, provides another example of the respect traditionally enjoyed by the fqih. Remembering his own zarda

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upon memorization of the entire Quran, an informant recounted:

> It is a joyful occasion for the family and the fqih... The (visiting) fqihs prayed for me and congratulated me on the event of my graduation. (The celebration) is at the same time an expression of gratitude for the great work the fqih has performed for the student and his family. The proof of his truthfulness, his faith and his industry is that he has borne his great message (i.e., 'that he has carried out his task').

This informant also recalled the practice among older students of organizing a zarda expressly for the fqih, as a show of their thanks and respect.

Such traditional respect for the fqih has not, in many instances, survived the effects of modernization of the school system. In the 1930's, with the nationalization of the Qarawiyyin and Yusufiyya universities by the French, one outcome was that the teacher became a paid government employee; he was no longer an independent figure who required and received support from the host Muslim community motivated by religious canons. Eickelman (1978) suggests that an erosion of status resulting from the French policy, led many of these university teachers to seek less remunerative, but more traditionally respected positions as fqihs in rural areas[9]. A Moroccan journalist reporting on the results of "Operation Quranic School," observed that "the community is (now) more attentive to the modern school teacher than to the fqih, to the extent that the latter has become one person too many, indeed even a subject of jokes" (El Koundi, 1983).

A loss of respect is further reflected in the following responses to one of our ethnographic questions:

> Interviewer: It is said that long ago when a father brought his son to the Quranic school, he would tell the fqih, "If you kill my son, I will bury him." What do you think of this saying?
>
> Fqih A: This (saying) is very famous and very old. Anyway it is a good saying. In the old days people used to respect and give value to the fqih. That is why they used to say this. It is just a sign of respect to the

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> fqih. That is why fqihs used to be serious and children used to memorize the Quran in four, five, or six years. But now there is no respect. We are not respected by people. We teach students who become doctors, engineers, and so on, but they forget that it was we who taught them, and that it is because of us that they are what they are.
>
> Fqih B: Long ago, when you wanted to read or write a letter, you looked in the whole quarter to find someone who was literate. That is why people used to respect the fqih, because he was the only one to teach children how to write and read. It was because of this that this saying (appeared). In fact it is not true that the fqih (actually) kills the student and the father buries him, but it is just an expression that shows the respect and value given to fqihs long ago.

Both informants clearly set their descriptions in the past tense. Implied in the second response, is the fact that the spread of general literacy through mandatory public schooling, has tended to strip the fqih of his once-special status as one of few literati in the community. A third informant, commenting on the question of whether special privileges are still accorded the fqih in his community, responded, "Not today, not today. (These days), the people respect him for his knowledge, they respect him for his correct behavior - if he behaves correctly - and that's all."

Status as measured by the economic recompense received for his teaching services is a particularly sensitive issue for the contemporary Moroccan fqih. The promise of "Operation Quranic School" has not included substantial financial support from the government for individual fqihs. The community still provides the fqih with a location in which to teach while the parents of students give him occasional gifts and a nominal monthly fee. However, few fqihs find this payment sufficient, and many employ themselves in other ways as well. Among our sample of former or practicing Quranic school teachers are: several prayer-leaders (imam; or murshid diniyy) in neighborhood mosques, two tailors; at least two amulet-writing traditional

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curers; and a shopkeeper. It has been argued that the experience of higher-level Quranic schooling, producing a network of friendships, alliances and contacts useful in many areas of later endeavors, is partially responsible for the substantial number of Quranic teachers (all former *musafirs* and madrasa students) involved in specialized economic networks that can utilize these contacts to advantage. Eickelman (1983a) found that a considerable number of Quranic teachers were involved in the cloth trade in rural central Morocco:

> . . . There was very little material profit (*rabh*) in being a Quranic teacher and more to be made in making the rounds of rural markets and communities. Being a Quranic teacher carried with it little sense of vocation or career. Memorization of the Quran was an end in itself and gave a person status; being a teacher did not.

While Quranic school teachers commonly sought other sources of income even before the Protectorate (Michaux-Bellaire, 1911), they have lately become much more aware of the relatively low remuneration levels for their own teaching when compared with those of salaried modern public school teachers. According to several *fqihs*, a major reason for the decline of Quranic higher education is that graduates of that system can expect only low-paying jobs, for which the earnings are often described as *kif walu* ("next to nothing"). Most of our *fqih* informants who are now employed primarily in other professions worked for a period as Quranic school teachers from a sense of duty to teach what they had learned, but left because of monetary problems. Several remember having learned tailoring or talisman-writing at the Quranic school while still Quranic students. Such skills were taught "so that the learners could find a way to earn some money." At least one *fqih* even considered working abroad as a migrant laborer, "because it is a good way to make money, and everybody wants more. The sea, too, wants more water." Explaining his decision to discontinue higher-level traditional Islamic

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studies, one informant stated, "It became evident to me that this reading led me nowhere. It merely instructed the student to memorize and explain the foundations (of the Islamic sciences) and then leave with no guarantee of a job or a future."[10]

The fqih as Quranic school teacher has experienced the appearance of a new rival educational system, a society increasingly oriented toward Western organizational ideals, and a host of shifting economic values and necessities -- each with definite consequences for his own position in the community. While the new techniques which have been introduced in the Quranic school may be effective for teaching general literacy skills, they have also compromised the traditional standards of rigor and concentration on the Quran and related religious material. Attendance of preschool-age children in Quranic schools has no doubt increased, with the government's official requirement of a preschool certificate for entry into modern primary school. However, mandatory public school attendance and the financial pressures of a modernizing society, have vastly reduced the number of older Quranic students, who traditionally provided the fqih with help in teaching the young, and who would themselves eventually bear the title of fqih.

V. Conclusions: History as Transformation and Transformation as History

In this paper, we have considered several key issues in understanding the fqih's function in Moroccan society, as possessor and teacher of religious literacy and religious knowledge. How has the significance of the term fqih changed with the changing roles of the Quranic school teacher and his school in Morocco? More generally, how may we evaluate change in a way that will illuminate the process of translating a "traditional" institution into a

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"modern" context? An answer may lie in approaching history as a process of continuous transformation. Such an approach would reject a static description of a "traditional" institution as though it were etched in stone, and would soften the borders between those useful but problematic bipolar terms, "traditional"/"modern", "historical"/"contemporary", even "then"/"now".

The future of the Quranic school appears to depend on the extent to which the fqih can perform functions of importance in a society undergoing rapid change. To assess his ability to do so requires a clear picture of where and how the fqih is embedded in the complex fabric of Moroccan society. He is possessor of the divinely unassailable content of Quranic teachings, mastery of which is fundamental to the Muslim faith. By virtue of his central position in the Quranic schools, the fqih has been intimately involved in the socialization of Moroccan children, sometimes over a period of many years. In addition, the fqih has been relatively free from Government control, when compared to teachers in the modern public school system.

All of these aspects of the fqih's position have been seen to change over time. He now teaches more than religious material; his role is primarily as a pre-school instructor; and he has lost much of his age-old autonomy with the increase in supervision by Government inspectors. Nonetheless, the number of children taught by the fqih is probably greater today than ever before. He is still sought out for a variety of religious, social, and medical problems, particularly in the lower socioeconomic strata of Morocco. Clearly, in one way or another, the fqih has demonstrated his ability to adapt to changing times.

One may ask, then, how Moroccans' conceptions of the fqih have been modified to accommodate these transformations in his role and position. One response is that the fqih is perceived in different ways across society,

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such that some bemoan his lost grandeur while others applaud his "evolution." The Quranic school teacher is still a living concept among Moroccans, clearly differentiated, for better or worse, from the French-styled nursery school monitrice or the modern public school teacher.

The fqih has played a major role in the long history of Moroccan social life. This role, as we have seen, has undergone a number of significant transformations which mirror other changes in the broader society. As the fqih has given up a significant part of his independence to the state, so have the family and the tribal fraction. As he has adopted a curriculum more in keeping with the literacy and numeracy needs of the child attending school, so too has Western acculturation eroded the strict practice of Islam within numerous sectors of Moroccan society. As the fqih has relinquished some of his power (in the folk expression, that of "life or death" over his charges) in the moral socialization of the child, so too have parents and extended families seen their control largely given up to the education provided by government schools, mass media, and life in the streets. Indeed, much of the strength and power left to the fqih seem to lie in the support of parents who view him as a potential counterbalance to these rapidly-changing times.

In conclusion, we see that the fqih is not merely a product of his times, but rather a part of the transforming process itself. This transformation is a history of the fqih, and at the same time, a history of the evolution of Moroccan society in the twentieth century. While a comparable statement might be made about many aspects of a society, the Moroccan fqih provides an especially interesting case, due to his centrality in traditional Moroccan society.

While some might claim that the contemporary adaptations of the fqih have given him a new and different identity, we would argue that the fqih

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still plays an important cultural role which is conceptually and ideologically very similar to his function in Moroccan society in previous centuries. Neither the fqih nor Moroccan society has remained static, but cultures have a way of reproducing themselves over generations, often through such key cultural agents as the Moroccan fqih.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Several methods have been employed in this research. These have included many hours of structured interviews with nine traditionally-educated fqihs employed primarily as Quranic preschool teachers; and seven others, also traditionally educated and bearing the title fqih, but who now teach in modern primary schools. Lengthy and more informal taped discussions were also held with several of the above, as well as with other fqihs not presently working as teachers; and a number of written autobiographical sketches were also solicited. Another method of ethnographic inquiry has been qualitative classroom observations of contemporary Quranic schools, providing a description of methods, materials, and activities. Finally, a review of the existing historical, ethnographic, and government-policy literature related to the topic has helped to corroborate our own findings and situate them in historical and political context. Translations from the Arabic and French were provided by Hussain Elalaoui-Talibi, Hicham an-Naggar, and Jennifer Spratt.

(2) Other important figures in the hierarchy of Islamic scholarship are the talib (advanced student, lit. "seeker of knowledge"); talb (colloquial deformation of talib, designating a mid-level scholar of Quranic recitation, and in common usage, virtually a synonym of fqih in the sense of Quranic school teacher and Quranic recitation performer); muqari' (the expert in several of the ten Quranic recitation variants, or riwayat); imam (prayer leader, himself a fqih usually elected by his community for the task); and 'alim (lit. "scholar" in any domain, although it generally refers to a scholar in the Islamic religious sciences). Like the term fqih, the usage of 'alim tends to be relative to the educational background of the user, but it is generally agreed that the 'alim has attained a level of education and scholarship greater than that of a fqih, and is usually engaged in pursuits of a more theoretical and philosophical nature. As one amulet-writing fqih told us:

> The 'alim knows the way to heaven and hell; he knows the stars, the seven heavens and what is in them, the seven earths and what is in them, the seas, engineering, medicine, geology. He knows the sciences. He knows what is between himself and his soul, that is, whether his soul is on the path to heaven or to hell. He knows how to deal with things, how to judge, how to communicate with other countries, and so on... He knows the Islamic Shari'a (law)... He knows how to be just in giving everyone his right.

(3) While attendance at Quranic school is a common memory for many Moroccan males, it was by no means universal. In poorer farming families that could not afford to give up the labor of their children, only one child might be sent to Quranic school — the only son, perhaps, or the eldest, or the one deemed most serious or pious — long enough to learn the rudiments of reading and writing, and a few chapters of the Quran. In certain sparsely settled mountain and

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desert regions of Morocco, neither Quranic nor public schools existed until relatively recently.

(4) This tradition of seeking sustenance from the larger Islamic community takes different forms in different societies. In Senegal, for example, groups of Quranic students might travel together over long distances for a period of months. This activity is judged by some to be "begging," but in Senegal it is a typical way for those devoted to the study of the Quran to survive while they are studying. It also appears to be a way for communication to be maintained by the relatively dispersed Islamic community of Senegal. (Wagner & Lotfi, 1982).

(5) Special training schools also existed, such as Sidi Zouine south of Marrakech, for the perfection of Quranic recitation variants, but these should not be confused with the mahads, which provided more comprehensive instruction in the Islamic sciences.

(6) The centrality of Arabic language studies in the Islamic education system cannot be understated: As one religious scholar explained:

> (The fqih) ... must have a thorough command of the Arabic language and of the sciences of the Arabic language. For that is the key that opens a true understanding of both the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. Without complete command of all the nuances of the Arabic language, of its rhetoric, its grammar, and all the sciences of the language, it is very difficult to thoroughly comprehend the sense of the verses of the Quran... (and) the traditions of the Prophet.

(7) In the Arabic, Lli dda wilduh li-l-madrasa, rda youm al-qiyam fi-l-jehennem."

(8) Even today, despite a government requirement which states that modern elementary education through grade five is mandatory for all school-age children, this law is often not enforced or even practicable in the most remote rural and mountain areas, due to a lack of convenient schools and the need for child labor in shepherding and farming.

(9) Another explanation for the retreat of many fqihs from larger educational centers during the French Protectorate, is that fqihs, as a literate and influential group, were suspected (in many cases correctly) of activism in the Moroccan struggle for independence in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The fqihs' exodus to remote rural regions enabled them to avoid harassment, and in some cases imprisonment, by French officials. Our rural fieldsite, according to informants, appears to have been a popular spot for such "fugitives," as it is situated in the Middle Atlas Mountains and had relatively little official French intervention during the Protectorate.

(10) This informant chose instead to attend a government institute in the province of Ouarzazate, where a special program allowed former Quranic students beyond the legal age (7 years) for modern school admission, to earn an elementary certificate recognized by the modern system. This certificate then

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enabled him to be 'integrated' in a modern secondary school program. Such routes, however, are no longer generally available for older Quranic students. With respect to "transfer of credits" and reciprocity between the Quranic and modern school systems, it is important to note that in the early years after independence in 1956, a government mechanism was available to train fqihs to become primary school teachers. Interested parties were required to pass a qualifying examination, and to successfully complete a one-to three-year state-run program at a teacher-training center (Markaz Takwin al-Mu'allimin). After a number of years of teaching with probationary status, the successful candidate received the CAPS diploma, accrediting him officially to teach in the public primary school system. Of our informants, ten opted to enter the modern teaching system in this way, although two have since returned to Quranic school teaching, and a third chose to return to school and is presently a full-time student in the public university system.

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